

Friendship Heights TMD Advisory Committee Meeting
Summary – Meeting of July 14, 2009

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Voting Members Present

April Birnbaum	Lerch, Early and Brewer, Representing New England Development
Tiffany Gee	Chevy Chase Land Company
Leonard Grant	Friendship Heights Village Council
William P. Farley	Town of Somerset
Mary Herman	Polinger Shannon and Luchs (Employer 50 or greater)
Bill McCloskey	Citizens Coordinating Committee on Friendship Heights
Robert Schwarzbart (Chair)	Friendship Heights Village Council
R. Mallory Starr (Vice Chair)	Somerset House Management Association

Non-Voting Members Present

Sandra L. Brecher	DOT/Transit Services Division-Commuter Services
Ken Hartman	B-CC Regional Services Center

TMD Staff Present

Jim Carlson	DOT/Transit Services Division-Commuter Services
Nakengi Byrd	DOT/Transit Services Division-Commuter Services

Absent

David Glass	Chevy Chase Village Board of Managers
Chief Roy Gordon	Chevy Chase Village Police
Capt. Russell Hamill	Montgomery County Police
Jessica Moore	The JBG Companies
Gregory Knoop	Oudens Knoop Knoop + Sachs Architects (Employer of fewer than 50)
Carlean Russell	Saks Fifth Avenue (Employer of 50 or greater)
Kenneth Williams	GEICO

Guests

George Brent, Jr.	WMATA
David L. Crawford	WMATA
Bob Joiner	The Agenda News
Stephen Petruccelli	WMATA (Ret.)
Barbara G. Tauben	Friendship Heights Village Civic Assn.
Cleo Tavani	Friendship Heights Village Civic Assn.

Items 1, 2 and, 3: Introductions/Agenda Review (additions/deletions): Members and guest introduced themselves.

Mr. Schwarzbart said that the July 4th event at Friendship Heights Village Center was well attended by federal, state and local political representatives. He tried to use the event to line up future speakers for the committee. Possible future guests are Councilmember **Nancy Floreen** in September; Delegate **Bill Frick** in October; Congressman **Chris Van Hollen**; Councilmember **Roger Berliner**; and B-CC police Commander **Hamill** and Chief **Roy Gordon** of Chevy Chase Village to talk about the county's speed camera program. Future meeting topics include the Redline accident updates and Purple Line construction.

Mr. Schwarzbart corrected the June minutes to show that the Irene Apartments represent 1,000 people, not 2000 as stated in the minutes.

Mary Herman corrected the minutes to reflect that she was absent at the June meeting (was listed as present in the minutes).

Mr. Petruccelli clarified for **Ms Brecher** that the 3-minute bus idling rule in residential areas included terminal idling as well because most terminals are in a mixed residential/commercial area.

June minutes were approved and seconded with changes.

Item 4 – WMATA Updates: **Mr. Schwarzbart** welcomed members and guests **Steven Petruccelli**, WMATA General Superintendent-Bus Operations (Ret.), **David Crawford**, Superintendent-Montgomery Division and, **George Brent**, Superintendent-Western Division.

Mr. Petruccelli introduced **Mr. Crawford** and **Mr. Brent**, stating both had worked their way up through the WMATA system serving on many committees and special projects with many years of experience. **Mr. Crawford** has, except for the Northern garage, worked in every garage in the Metro system and was instrumental to the S.E. garage closing. **Mr. Brent** relocated to the Western Division from the Northern Division. **Jackie Smith**, who attended the June TMD meeting, was the Acting Superintendent while **Mr. Brent** was on vacation. **Ms. Smith** is now working at the Western Division.

Mr. Petruccelli, per **Jim Carlson's** request, spoke to the Chief of Rail Operations about questions regarding ripped sidewalks, elevator and escalator issues. However, WMATA is waiting until the Red Line train accident investigations are complete before talking to the committee.

Mr. Schwarzbart asked **Mr. Petruccelli** about a newspaper article that referenced back-up rail transit systems. **Mr. Petruccelli** said that due to rail investigation currently underway, the National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB) has placed restrictions on WMATA representatives making appearances or comments unless authorized.

Mr. Petruccelli referred **Mr. Schwarzbart's** question regarding effects of possible budget cuts on bus service to **Mr. Crawford**, who said that even though there was talk of cutting the Q-line service, there were no budget cuts. He also announced that Next Bus, which started on July 1st is working well. Currently, WMATA is rechecking Next Bus signs to ensure the bus numbers are correct. Over the next two weeks 1,200 bus stops will be completed.

In reference to the Q-line, **Mr. Petruccelli** added that proposals for the Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) system included the Q-line. However Veirs Mill Road has right-of-way issues to be resolved.

Ms. Brecher stated, in regards to **Mr. Schwarzbart** asking if Ride-On service was affected by Metro budget cuts, that Ride-On bus system is separate from Metro. Ride On did face some service cuts, but the cuts were averted by raising Express Bus fares to \$3.00, which is the same as Metro charges.

Mr. Schwarzbart asked **Mr. Petruccelli** if there was any need for future terminal construction for the BRT. **Mr. Petruccelli** said that any future terminal construction would be dependent on the flow of traffic and ridership demands after any part of the BRT system is in place. Work has been only informally presented to the county planners.

Mr. Schwarzbart asked who will have jurisdiction over the BRT when it is built. **Mr. Petruccelli** said that any form of the BRT will be in Montgomery County so it depends on the contractors and if WMATA will operate jointly with Montgomery County and Ride-On. There are legal issues with WMATA contracts-things remain to be seen.

Mr. Starr asked about the future of the Western Garage property. **Mr. Brent** said that there is nothing on the Western Garage however; the Northern Garage is slated to be closed within five years.

Mr. Petruccelli said that there were plans to put the Western Garage in a “cave” and develop over the top like a garage in Toronto. That plan was scrapped due to developer funding issues. He said the Toronto garage worked but there was a problem of employees suffering from light deprivation because of inefficient lighting.

Mr. Petruccelli also said that WMATA was trying to buy property adjacent to the garage to renovate and upgrade, but that was stopped due to funding issues as well. Since the Western Garage is central to the Metrobus system and operates the longest line in the Metro system (30 lines), any changes would be difficult to make.

Ms. Brecher asked what the plans are for the Northern Garage. **Mr. Brent** said that teams have come out and gone through the building, which is 103 years old, and made many upgrades and changes; however, now there is no more room for improvement. He explained the Northern Garage planning process (of which he was not part). Teams of 30 went through the building asking for update recommendations from personnel. Two weeks later **Mr. Brent** was informed that Northern Garage was going to close in five years time. **Ms. Brecher** asked if the garage is closing because a new one is being built. **Mr. Petruccelli** said that they have been trying to replace the South East garage for the past two years. Blue Plains was the site chosen for construction, but there were funding and environmental delays. He hopes that there has been movement on construction of the project.

Mr. Starr asked if there was a possibility of the Northern Garage being turned into a historical site since it is 103 years old. **Mr. Petruccelli** said that the attractive building was formally the Capital Traction Railroad Company. In the mid 80s, due to neighborhood outcry the building was renovated rather than destroyed. The renovation was an expensive process that included building a parking garage to accommodate patrons who did not live in the permit parking only neighborhood and correcting environmental noise issues. The infrastructure problems were solved at the time; however, over time new environmental noise problems have made further renovations too costly for such an old building. Pieces of the old Capital Traction Railroad are under parts of the floor. **Mr. Petruccelli** added that even though the building is old, all contaminants such as asbestos have been removed over the years.

A member asked if the bus stop that was removed during construction on Wisconsin Avenue at Bloomingdale’s was going to be replaced. **Mr. Brent** said he did not know but would check into it.

Ms. Tauben provided background information about the Friendship Heights Village Civic Association (FHVCA) to WMATA representatives, explaining that the Association closely follows the Wisconsin Place development. The Association discovered some issues with the street work around the development. There are three sets of stairs encouraging passenger drop off and pick up in front of Wisconsin Place; the drop offs could interfere with traffic using the right turn lane, which will also be a bus lane if the stop is reinstated. The 30 line buses will have to make a sharp left turn into traffic in order to proceed south into the District. These concerns have been brought to the attention of developers and county officials. **Ms. Brecher** said that the committee, along with the WMATA representatives, will do a walk-through of the site after today’s meeting.

Mr. Schwarzbart, referring back to the June meeting, discussed **Mary Catherine Johns’** comments about the shuttle van of the Irene Apartments. **Ms. Johns** is concerned for the safety of some residents who are not physically capable that are dropped off at a dangerous location at Wisconsin Avenue and Wisconsin Circle just outside the Friendship Heights terminal. The Village of Friendship Heights has offered to share their stop, which is inside the terminal, with the Irene van. **Jackie Smith** said at the June meeting she would look into it, but there has been no movement on the matter. **Mr. Brent** said he did not know why there has been nothing done but he will find out today.

Cleo Tavani discussed her concerns about the Sibley Hospital shuttle passengers who have to cross terminal lanes in order to catch the shuttle at Wisconsin Circle during the hospital’s construction process. She also asked

WMATA to check into enforcing traffic for Bethesda Auto shuttle vans on Wisconsin circle that use bus turns to make illegal U-turns when dropping off passengers. **Mr. Petruccelli** said he would contact **Michael Tayborne** from Transit Police and see if he would work with Montgomery County police to enforce traffic violations. Metro Transit Police and the U.S. Park Police are the only police that have jurisdiction to enforce in the eight jurisdictions of Montgomery County, Prince Georges County, Washington D.C., Arlington, Alexandria, Fairfax, Falls Church and Falls Church City. **Mr. Petruccelli** said that there was traffic enforcement at Friendship Heights during construction and it took about a week to stop the violations.

Ms. Brecher commented that Metro Bus ridership has gone up since the accident and asked if that was a continuing trend. **Mr. Crawford** said that ridership was up six months before the accident due in part to the effect of last year's high gas prices. **Mr. Petruccelli** clarified that there was a small spike after the accident and, according to newspaper articles, people ride the bus because it's faster. He answered **Mr. Schwarzbart's** question about manual operation of trains during the accident investigation, stating that all trains will be on manual operation for the foreseeable future and he does not know how this will affect service.

Ms. Brecher commented on the crowded trains when she rode Metro recently to get to a meeting in Rockville. **Mr. Brent** said Metro tries to lessen the crowds by starting trains at Grovesnor station.

Ms. Brecher commented Ride On ridership is down due to the economy, because there are fewer people working and riding. **Mr. Petruccelli** said that Metro's ridership was up in part because the District's workforce comes from all areas of the region.

Mr. Schwarzbart announced the current new meeting location the conference room of the new Friendship Heights TRiPs Commuter Store which he congratulated **Ms. Brecher** on opening. **Ms. Brecher** thanked **Tiffany Gee** from Chevy Chase Land Company for her help in the construction and said that the store does not officially open until Friday, July 17th pending an official walk-through.

Item 5 Updates-Pending Issues: **Mr. Carlson** updated the committee on the dangerous traffic condition on Friendship Blvd., stating that No Standing signs had been put up by the county to keep the travel lanes clear on east side of Friendship Blvd. between Western and Willard Avenues. There was a problem with the slow processing of the work order and the county could not put up temporary signs in the meantime. The signs appeared to be working. Also, the GEICO signal coordination problem on Western Avenue between Jenifer St. N.W. had been submitted to DDOT.

Leonard Grant recognized the extra efforts of the County Police, in particular **Capt. Russ Hamill**, in assisting the community in resolving the dangerous situation that existed on Friendship Blvd.

April Birnbaum commented about recent emails some members may have received about the mid-block crosswalk on Friendship Blvd. New England Development wishes to add some clarification regarding the crosswalks. An earlier arrangement that New England Development had with DOT stated that if DOT approved a crosswalk, then New England Development would build it. There were studies done at the time, but ultimately DOT did not approve a crosswalk. Therefore, New England Development built its sidewalks, curbs and ramps accordingly. New England Development is not against building a crosswalk at this juncture, when most of the construction has been completed; however, the financial responsibility should not be the developer's. Such construction at this phase would require rebuilding the curbs, ramps and sidewalks.

Cleo Tavani added that, while the midblock crosswalk was one of the planned pedestrian amenities, it was a requirement only if both Wisconsin Place and GEICO redeveloped their properties. GEICO has no immediate plans for redevelopment.

Item 6 Other Business: **Mr. Carlson** announced that the A₂CE Awards Luncheon (*Advocates for Alternative Commuting Excellence*) was a success. Employers are chosen for awards based on those that do outstanding jobs based on their Traffic Mitigation Plan of promoting alternative forms of transit to the job site. **Mr. Carlson** thanked all who attended and said the event was also attended by the Chief of Transit Services, **Carolyn Biggins**, and DOT Director, **Art Holmes, Jr.** He stated that due to budgetary issues and based on the positive responses of the participants, future employer recognition events will likely follow a similar format. **Ms. Brecher** said that attendees liked the interaction the smaller scale event provided.

Ms. Brecher stated that Ride On will be receiving new buses with new paint schemes. There will be a major press event announcing the buses; CSS staff is coordinating with DOT and the County Executive's office to include the grand opening of the Friendship Heights TRiPS Commuter Store. The County has taken delivery of a few of the new buses, so some people have probably already seen the new appearance.

There are some continuing environmental issues with the construction of the new North County Depot. The Department of General Services (DGS) has said the County will comply with whatever more stringent constraints are called for on the site. There are concerns about water quality in the general area, among other issues. The project, originally planned to accommodate 250 buses, has been scaled back to 120 buses. **Ms. Brecher** urged members to follow the issue closely, because the facility will be critical in supporting bus service throughout the County.

The Parking Management Division of DOT will be issuing an RFP for a vendor to provide parking payment by cell phone. This will make parking easier through a more convenient payment method; tickets will be fewer because customers will get a reminder on their cell phone. Customers will be able to add money to their meter remotely. **Ms. Brecher** said the transit community needs to keep pace with technology, and cell phone transactions are currently the newest way to access services.

Ms. Brecher stated that the recent effort of **Councilmember Leventhal** to disband the Silver Spring TMD Advisory Committee does not appear to have support. Members of the Council's Management & Fiscal Policy (MFP) Committee – **Chair Duchy Trachtenberg, Nancy Navarro and Valerie Ervin** – are not supportive of the measure. The move to disband the committee brought to mind how best to use the committees and how best to track their progress and contributions. **Ms. Brecher** asked that members give some thought to how best to move forward during the new fiscal year with its mission to provide advice to the County Executive and DOT, as the operator of the TMD, on issues dealing with reducing traffic congestion, improving pedestrian access and safety, and improving air quality. **Ms. Brecher** and **Mr. Carlson** have discussed re-instituting an earlier document, a matrix of projects and issues affecting the TMD; issues such as the bus terminal, TRiPS, pedestrian safety projects and others. The matrix will include brief information, such as the history of the project or issue, current status, stakeholders, etc. and will be the 'work plan' for the year.

The meeting concluded with a brief walking tour of the TMD.

Next meeting date: Sept. 8, 2009